

Message

From: Enck, Judith [Enck.Judith@epa.gov]
Sent: 11/20/2015 4:07:35 PM
To: Pieh, Luseñi [Pieh.Luseñi@epa.gov]; Jones, Jim [Jones.Jim@epa.gov]; Etzel, Ruth [Etzel.Ruth@epa.gov]; Wilson, Shari [Wilson.Shari@epa.gov]; Lott, Don [Lott.Don@epa.gov]; Rupp, Mark [Rupp.Mark@epa.gov]
Subject: USVI Pesticides Conference

Below are a few media clips on the Integrated Pest Management conference in USVI this week. It is clear that there is an appetite for much more information on IPM in USVI. We did this one day conference on a shoe string, paying the air fare for two presenters and then a lot of region 2 staff time. The Governor requested that we do this again in St. Croix, USVI which we have tentatively agreed to do on Saturday, March 12. We were requested to also focus on agriculture, so we will do that by adding a workshop on the new Worker Protection Standards, along with IPM.

We have also been requested to repeat this one day IPM Conference in Puerto Rico. We will attempt that. If there is any hq funding available, please let me know. We will find free venues and do the staff work, but it would be good to have funding for invitational travel.

Many thanks,
Judith

In wake of poisonings, changes to Pesticide Act

DPNR announces plan at conference that was prompted by poisoning of family at Sirenusa

20 Nov 2015

The Virgin Islands Daily News

By ASHLEY MAYRIANNE JONES Daily News Staff

ST. THOMAS— The Department of Planning and Natural Resources has announced plans to promote natural alternatives to toxic pesticides and to draft new applications for commercial and purchase permits related to pesticide application.

The decision came Wednesday during the “Reducing Pesticides in the US Virgin Islands” conference at the Charles W. Turnbull Regional Library, co-hosted by DPNR and the Environmental Protection Agency.

The full-day conference was the first of its kind to take place in the V.I. and more than 100 participants attended, according to EPA Region 2 Administrator Judith Enck.

The focus of the conference was on “integrated pest management,” which saves money, prevents health damage and eliminates the need for pesticides, which quite often don’t work in the first place, Enck said. Integrated pest management focuses on using “common sense” solutions, such as maintaining a clean home and ensuring all windows have bug screens, Enck said.

Sirenusa

The conference was “an offshoot” of the March incident at Sirenusa, in which a family of tourists was poisoned by the illegal use of methyl bromide at Sirenusa in St. John, Gov. Kenneth Mapp said in his opening remarks at the conference.

According to Enck, the two boys — Ryan and Sean Esmond — are still in the hospital, and they and their father, Stephen, are not expected to recover from neurological damage.

“As a mother, I worry about these boys, who once had such bright futures,” Enck said. “Due to this application, their lives are changed forever. We want to make sure this never happens again.”

Enck said the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry followed up with the other people affected in the Sirenusa incident, and that anyone who was suspected to have been exposed, such as hotel staff and first responders, was followed up on with a one-on-one medical evaluation.

"We wanted to make sure those most immediately affected were taken care of," Enck said.

Enck said she is awaiting the final report regarding how many people were adversely affected.

Terminix

After the poisoning, DPNR Commissioner Dawn Henry, who had just been appointed to the position, initiated an investigation to find where methyl bromide was being used elsewhere in the territory. The department issued "stop use" orders for everyone who was using methyl bromide, which included commercial and residential applicators, Henry said.

According to Department of Planning and Natural Resources spokesman Jamal Neilsen, while Terminix still has its business license, the applicator, Jose Riveras, had his certification revoked.

According to Enck, the EPA conducted an investigation to find out where the methyl bromide came from and found it had been distributed from Puerto Rico.

"As of today, I can say there is no methyl bromide use in the territory," Henry said. The canisters containing the chemical were sent back to the manufacturer in Puerto Rico for proper disposal, she said.

Goals for DPNR

DPNR will be working on two goals — revising the Pesticide Act of 2006 and drafting new applications for commercial and purchase permits. Pesticides currently are regulated through DPNR's Division of Environmental Protection, Henry said.

The updated Pesticide Act would require regulation that further manages professional applicators throughout the territory. A draft is in the works, and will later be available for public comment, Henry said.

Through the current statute, the Division of Environmental Protection is working on a draft application for commercial permits, which would require people who sell pesticides to keep certain records and maintain a database for Department of Planning and Natural Resources to keep track of what is trafficked into and out of the territory.

"The new certification will give us a better picture of what is in the territory," Henry said.

A draft application for purchase permits, which would ensure users and applicators are properly trained, is also in the works, Henry said.

Professional pesticide applicators currently obtain certification and undergo training through classes at the University of the Virgin Islands, Henry said. Certification is valid for four years.

"The Department of Planning and Natural Resources wants to give applicators better access to key resources and the training they need," Henry said.

Henry said moreso than setting regulations, the goal of the conference was to educate people about integrated pest management and natural pest management so toxic chemicals don't need to be used in the first place.

Most of it is common sense: disposing of trash properly; cleaning the counters; and like the traditions of old, sweeping inside, and outside, Henry said. People used to sweep their dirt yards with separate outside brooms, keeping bugs away by maintaining a clean yard, Henry said.

"We have a rich cultural heritage in using alternative methods to manage pesticides," she said. "I think it's sometimes necessary for people to know what they are doing is right. All natural, safer alternatives are better for human and environmental health."

What's next

Enck said the next initiative will be to extend the integrated pest management conference to St. Croix, especially to discuss the use of agricultural pesticides and the EPA's revised Worker Protection Standard Act, which is aimed at guarding farm workers against toxic chemicals.

The new federal standards, which EPA had not revised in 20 years, were finalized Nov. 2 and will go into effect in January, Enck said.

According to Enck, there were no age restrictions on who could apply pesticides or common sense preventions, such as ensuring farmers had adequate access to water to dilute the chemical should they be exposed.

Agriculture Commissioner Carlos Robles attended the conference in the afternoon, said Henry, and DPNR and Agriculture will be forming a partnership to develop strategies for more sustainable farming.

"We will be looking towards organic farming as we move forward," Henry said.

A two-day training collaboration between the EPA, the Puerto Rico Department of Agriculture and DPNR, also is being planned for December.

EPA's New Farmworker Pesticide Standards Leave Unanswered Questions

WSKG NEWS

By MICHELLE FAUST • Nov. 20, 2105

Raucous laughter fills a small communal kitchen as ten men shout and joke with each other in Spanish after a long day of picking apples on an orchard in Orleans County in Western New York. They're playing a game of charades. But instead of pantomiming movie titles or celebrities, the men are acting out symptoms of acute pesticide exposure, which include things like rashes, headaches, vomiting, and eye irritation.

The game is part of a training put on by the Worker Justice Center—a labor advocacy group—to teach workers about pesticide safety and their rights. In person trainings like these will soon be more frequent on farms, now that the EPA has released updated standards for farmworker protection that include requirements for annual training. The update—announced this fall—is the first time the agency has changed its Worker Protection Standards in 23 years.

Regulators and farmworker advocates say the changes to these standards are overdue, but some groups representing farmers object to the change. Both sides see challenges ahead for implementing and enforcing the standards.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates that each year there are 10,000 to 20,000 incidents of pesticide poisoning for people work on farms, nurseries, and commercial forest land. Advocacy groups say there may be many more. In addition to symptoms caused by acute exposure, the EPA is concerned that repeated, low level exposure to pesticides may have long-term health effects.

When new regulations kick in early 2017, farmers will be required comply with tightened safety measures. The updated standards include measures such as expanded requirements for no-entry zones to protect workers from pesticide overspray, expanded access to information about pesticides, changes to personal protection equipment standards, a minimum age requirement for working with pesticides (no children under 18), and more.

Training is key to safety

One of the biggest changes is the mandatory annual training—it used to be required every five years. Paola Betchart of the Worker Justice Center explains pesticide exposure is preventable if you know how to protect yourself. The new regulations expand the types of the things workers must learn in training, including instructions to reduce pesticides on work clothing that may come home with them at the end of the work day.

The new standards require an EPA-trained certified trainer to stay in the room after playing training videos to ask and answer questions. This is key, says Betchart.

"The quality of the training is important, because if they just see one video that is very old, some of them they don't get all the full information," she says.

National farm industry representatives don't believe annual trainings are needed, especially if workers passed training exams in the past. "To me, that seems to be a bit wasteful," says Daren Coppock, President and CEO of the Agricultural Retailers Association.

He sees it as just another rule that state and federal governments impose on agriculture, straining their businesses in many small ways, what he calls a "death by a thousand cuts."

But says Judith Enck, EPA administrator for the region that includes New York State, the EPA wants to ensure safety information is top of mind for farmworkers. "Five years is just far too long to remember vital information," Enck says.

The risk of speaking up

At their recent training, the group of New York apple pickers said they've had symptoms, but aren't sure if they were from allergies or pesticides. Sometimes, they're similar. And they didn't know where to find out which chemicals were used in their fields and what their effects were. (Current EPA standards require that information be available to them.)

An apple picker named Isabel (we've agreed to call her by her first name), recalls a time she and a group of coworkers noticed sprayers working about ten rows away. She says they felt droplets of pesticides sprinkling down on them and later experienced nausea and headaches, but were told the substance wasn't toxic.

But when training or other safety measures are inadequate, it can be hard for farmworkers to do anything about it, for fear of risking their jobs.

"We're afraid that if we speak out, if we say that they treat us poorly, they won't bring us back to the farm," said one man, named Juan who we've agreed to only call by his first name.

EPA's Enck says one goal of the updated standards is to protect against retaliation for whistleblowers.

"You and I are not exposed to pesticides when we show up to work every day, neither should farmworkers. They deserve fair and equitable working conditions," says Enck.

How do you enforce new rules?

Enforcing the EPA's standards is a task left to state agencies. Farmworker advocates claim many states are not doing enough to make sure existing standards are enforced, let alone regulate the new ones.

But agricultural industry groups claim farmers already comply with the law which requires them to follow the instructions on the pesticide's label.

"I'm not sure that a duplicative layer of regulations makes anybody safer. It does increase the paperwork burden," says Coppock.

In New York, where there are 35,500 farms, inspections are done by the Department of Environmental Conservation. In the last fiscal year, the department conducted 22 inspections, found 14 violations, and issued 6 warnings and no fines.

In contrast, California, a state with 76,400 farms, has some of the strictest rules in the country governing pesticides and how they can be used. The California Department of Pesticide Regulation conducts approximately 9,500 field inspections each year.

Charlotte Fadipe, spokesperson for this California agency calls enforcement critical. "Farming, to us, is an outdoor factory, and it does not make sense to have that factory unsafe," she says. "We want to make sure that the workers are safe so we put in place some very, very tough regulations. People sometimes complain that they're too tough, but for us it's about protecting the people who grow our food."

Missing data

Farming industry representatives say the EPA doesn't have enough data to make a case to justify more stringent regulation of pesticide use.

Farmworker advocates agree more data is needed. But it would likely show the need for these regulations and strong enforcement of them, says Amy Liebman, Director of Environmental and Occupational Health for Migrant Clinicians Network.

"We would be able to collect more data if we had the following: One, if we had medical monitoring for pesticide applicators. Two, if we had a national system of reporting and it was a requirement, and three is we would like for clinicians to have more tests available to them."

Still Liebman, who worked on a committee that helped advise the EPA on its updated standards, says they are a step in the right direction. "One of the goals that farmworker advocates have is to make sure at the very least, farmworkers are provided protections that are provided to all other workers in other industries," she says.

EPA and DPNR Aim to Tighten Regulation of Pesticide Use

VI Source

By David Knight Jr. — November 18, 2015

DPNR Commissioner Dawn Henry and EPA Region Two Administrator Judith Enck update the press at a conference on integrated pest management.

Improving regulatory control over the use of pesticides in the territory is a top priority of the Environmental Protection Agency and the V.I. Department of Planning and Natural Resources, officials from both agencies said at a press conference at the Charles W. Turnbull Regional Library on Wednesday.

DPNR Commissioner Dawn Henry and EPA Region Two Administrator Judith Enck met with members of the media as part of a conference on integrated pest management, an industry term meaning nontoxic or less toxic alternatives to pesticides.

The EPA and DPNR's Division of Environmental Protection began organizing the conference in June as a first step in changing the way the territory thinks about pest control.

The potential dangers of pesticides caught the attention of Virgin Islanders in March after a Delaware family vacationing on St. John at Sirenusa condominiums was poisoned by an illegal application of methyl bromide. Three of the four family members have permanent neurological damage as a result of their exposure to the pesticide, Enck said Wednesday. The family's two sons remain in the hospital.

An investigation revealed that the pest control company Terminix applied the methyl bromide at Sirenusa even though the highly toxic fumigant is not authorized for use within residential structures. The EPA restricts the substance's use to a very few situations, none of which are applicable to the V.I.

"There are some limited uses," explained Enck. "For instance, strawberry fields in California, processing of smoked ham in North Carolina. And then the more common usage is in ports – big containers that are shipping flowers and fruits and vegetables – but it's a very controlled setting; it's a quarantined area that is regulated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. So there are a couple of applications in Puerto Rico, but none in the V.I."

Henry said that since March all methyl bromide canisters, both full and empty, have been removed from the territory.

DPNR is the agency responsible for regulating the use of pesticides locally. The agency contracts the University of the Virgin Islands' Cooperative Extension Service to provide training for pesticide applicators.

Pesticide certification courses continue to be offered by UVI, Henry said, despite reports made earlier in the year that they had ceased due to a potential misuse of grant money. DPNR maintains that a misperception

was caused by the fact that the department had delayed payment to the university during the finalization of a contract.

DPNR now wants to expand and strengthen the enforcement of its permitting of pesticide applicators. Henry said the agency has drafted new applications for permits that will be required for the selling and purchasing of restricted-use pesticides.

"On the commercial side we are hoping that the distributors, persons that are selling restricted-use pesticides, will now through our permits be required to keep certain records they can present to the department on a periodic basis, so we know what the traffic is within the territory as it relates to restricted-use pesticides," said Henry.

Those on the other side of the same transactions, the buyers of pesticides, will need to be permitted by DPNR as well.

Henry said DPNR has also drafted new regulations for its pesticide program that will soon be unveiled through a public hearing process.

Regulations aren't just being tightened in the V.I., according to Enck. Just a few weeks ago, the EPA finalized new national regulations on worker protection standards that will go into effect in 2017, she said. Those regulations are designed to protect agricultural workers from the effects of pesticides. She said they have not been updated for 20 years.

According to V.I. law, training to certify pest control applicators must include the latest practices and principles of integrated pest management, the subject of Wednesday's conference.

"The whole point of integrated pest management is to get to the root of the problem," said Enck.

This partly means controlling environmental factors that draw pests, rather than eradicating them when they are at the point of infestation, she said.

"If you have a contract with a pesticide applicator where they show up every month on schedule to spray a restricted-use pesticide, that means you're not dealing with the root of the problem because the pest continues to enter."

Enck said the fact that integrated pest management is not only safer and more sustainable, but also less expensive than using pesticides, should encourage people and companies to adopt its principles.

"We really need consumers to pay attention because I think consumers are going to drive the change," she said.

Speaking at Wednesday's conference on integrated pest management were national experts in the field, including Dr. Jody Gangloff-Kaufmann of Cornell University; Timothy Madere, Special Project Manager for the City of New Orleans; Dr. Philip Landrigan of Mount Sinai Hospital; Dr. Perry Sheffield Mount Sinai School of Medicine; Dr. Ruth Etzel, the childrens' health senior advisor to EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy, and EPA senior advisor Claudia Gutierrez.

Family's poisoning leads to pesticides conference

Virgin Islands Daily News

By ASHLEY Mayrienne JONES (Daily News Staff)

November 16, 2015

Wednesday, nine months after a family was poisoned by methyl bromide on St. John, the Environmental Protection Agency and Department of Natural Resources will be co-hosting a "Reducing Pesticides in the V.I." conference to educate the hospitality sector on alternative uses for pest management.

The conference, which is the first of its kind in the Virgin Islands, is a direct response to the incident in March, in which four members of the Esmond family suffered severe medical complications after being exposed to fumes during their stay at Sirenusa, according to EPA Region 2 Regional Administrator Judith Enck.

According to Enck, three of the four family members suffered "serious neurological damage that they will probably never recover from." The two teenage boys remain in the hospital, she said, and the EPA enforcement case is ongoing.

Enck said that she and V.I. Department of Planning and Natural Resources Commissioner Dawn Henry "are very concerned and we want to make sure this does not happen again," Enck said. "There is a need to educate people."

The full-day conference will focus on integrated pest management as an alternative to toxic pesticides, said Enck, and will feature experts from around the nation.

Integrated pest management involves eliminating the pest problem at its source with preventative measures such as closing screens and cleaning up food residue, rather than reaching for a pesticide as a first option, Enck said.

Alternative measures can be applied to all pests, from termites to rodents, Enck said.

"For instance, in New York, there is a mouse problem. I could put out poison, or I could put out the tried-and-true mousetrap, and avoid using the toxic material," Enck said.

While the conference is geared towards hotels, restaurants and schools, Enck said she encourages the general public to attend the conference as well, even if for only part of the day.

"We are targeted at the hospitality sector because of what happened on St. John, but we want the general public to attend as well," she said.

Most of the time, cutting off the pests' food supply by placing trash bins further away from a building or ensuring counter tops are cleaned will greatly reduce the pest problem, Enck said.

"You don't want to be a good host for them," Enck said.

The conference will feature speeches by Enck, Henry and Gov. Kenneth Mapp.

Dr. Jody Gongloff-Kaufmann of Cornell University will speak about reducing the use of pesticides in hotels, schools and restaurants, and Timothy Madere, a special projects coordinator for the city of New Orleans, will speak about reducing pesticides in the home.

There also will be a keynote speech by well-respected physician Dr. Philip Landrigan of Mt. Sinai Hospital, who will talk about the harmful health effects of pesticides, and a speech about children's vulnerability to pesticides by Dr. Ruth Etzel, Enck said.

Other speakers include EPA Senior Advisor Claudia Gutierrez, Department of Planning and Natural Resources Director Norman Williams, and Dr. Perry Sheffield from Mount Sinai School of Medicine.

The conference will be held from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Wednesday at the Charles Turnbull Regional Library on St. Thomas, and is free and open to the public. Those interested in attending can register by calling 212-637-5038 or by visiting www.epa-r2-ipm.eventbrite.com.

###